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A LIFE-COURSE APPROACH TO CO-OFFENDING IN ORGANIZED CRIME

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A life-course approach to co-offending in organized crime

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Abstract

One of the most documented findings on delinquent behavior is that many crimes are committed in the company of others rather than by solo offenders. Besides studying the characteristics of co-offending, recent works have focused on understanding its evolution over the individual criminal career, and its impact on the offending trajectory. Co-offending is especially relevant within organized criminal groups, where interactions among participating offenders constitute the core functioning of the criminal organization, and crimes committed are often logistically complex. In spite of this, few studies on co-offending in organized crime exist, and none of them investigates the role that co-offending has on the offending pathway of the single individual. This study addresses this gap in research by analyzing data on all the 178,427 crimes committed by 11,138 offenders convicted for mafia association in Italy between 1985 and 2017. The data set includes information on whether each crime was committed with accomplices. The analysis exploits different quantitative methodologies with the aim to describe the characteristics of co-offenses and co-offenders in organized crime; determine whether organized crime offenders have different longitudinal co-offending trajectories; investigate whether committing crimes with others impacts future offending; and understand how co-offending is related to recruitment into organized crime.

Results demonstrate that co-offending is not an incidental feature of crimes committed by organized crime offenders. Some of the characteristics of co-offending in organized crime reflect findings from other offending samples, but some peculiarities emerge. Furthermore, the longitudinal co-offending behavior of Italian organized crime offenders is best approximated by five trajectories that group offenders with distinct characteristics. Finally, co-offending is related to changes in the future offending behavior of organized crime offenders: in particular, it is related to higher chances of engaging in violent forms of delinquency and experiencing organized crime recruitment in the short term. These findings are discussed in relation to both research on the developmental course of offending for members of organized criminal groups, and existing knowledge on the causes and consequences of offending with others.